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Chair: Ms. Kazsas ..... (Hungary)

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In the absence of Mr. Gunnarsson (Iceland), Chair, Ms. Kaszas (Hungary), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 28: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/72/38)

(a) Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/72/93, A/72/134, A/72/207 and A/72/215)

(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (*continued*) (A/72/203 and A/72/220)

1. **Mr. Ali** (Pakistan) said that while progress had been made in improving the status of women globally, longstanding institutional gender inequalities in Pakistan required greater attention and sustained advocacy. Pakistan's Constitution guaranteed equal rights for all and the full participation of women in national life. Pioneering women had attained senior posts in Government and the armed forces, among them the first female Prime Minister in the Muslim world.

2. Gender equality and women's development were among the focuses of Pakistan's major initiatives, including its Vision 2025 blueprint for sustainable and inclusive development, the National Sustainable Development Strategy, the National Education Policy, the National Climate Change Policy and the National Disaster Management Plan.

3. Government measures to reduce the feminization of poverty included the promotion of women's participation in the workforce through non-traditional skill development and increased availability of financial resources, expansion of the social safety net to provide stipends to millions of women, and the enactment of legislation promoting the rights of women working from home and protecting women against harassment in the workplace, acid and burn assaults, rape, domestic violence and other crimes.

4. **Mr. Islam** (Bangladesh) said that Bangladesh had achieved remarkable success in advancement of women, in recognition of which the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, had been declared Planet 50-50 Champion by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and granted the Agent of Change Award by the Global Partnership Forum in 2016. Women had been elected to office at all levels, and Bangladesh was possibly the only country where the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Speaker and Deputy Leader of the House were all women.

5. Bangladesh ranked first among South Asian countries in the 2016 Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum and was implementing a range of fruitful policies prioritizing gender equality and women's participation in the workforce, which had jumped from 7 per cent in 2000 to approximately 40 per cent currently. The Government was mainstreaming the development of rural and marginalized women by providing a social security net and easier access to credit while also building social awareness to address forced labour, early marriage, and violence against women and girls.

6. Bangladesh was managing a humanitarian crisis of over half a million undocumented Myanmar nationals, mostly women and children. The international community needed to address the vulnerability of women and girls in the face of conflict situations and other adversities including climate change.

7. **Ms. Bellout** (Algeria) said that Algeria had complied with key international human rights commitments encompassing the rights of women, and had adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Government had also implemented a range of strategies and legislative amendments enhancing women's participation in civil and political life, including a law requiring the inclusion of women in the leadership of political parties, four of which were currently headed by women.

8. A strategy established in 2007 and reinforced in 2015 had consolidated the efforts of stakeholders and civil society to combat violence against women. To safeguard women and their property and financial resources, the Criminal Code sanctioned all forms of violence including sexual and verbal abuse as well as psychological and economic violence. The Government attached great importance to the involvement of women in national development through measures encompassing the creation of microenterprises and income-generating activities, and had established two mechanisms to develop appropriate public policy.

9. **Mr. Kayinamura** (Rwanda) said that as a member of its Executive Board, Rwanda would continue to support the significant contributions of UN-Women to the advancement and empowerment of women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remained the most comprehensive global framework for the full realization of women's rights, but some countries were deficient in implementation of all twelve critical areas.

10. A legal and policy framework for women's economic empowerment had been implemented to grant easier access to land and finance, helping to drastically reduce the proportion of women in extreme poverty. Beyond the minimum 30 per cent quota established in the Rwandan constitution for women in all decision-making positions, women accounted for 64 per cent of parliamentary seats, over 38 per cent of the Senate, over 47 per cent of Government positions and approximately 40 per cent of the judiciary.

11. Strategies for gender mainstreaming in information and communication technologies had contributed significantly to women's empowerment through improved access to market information and increased business initiatives for women. Remaining challenges to the economic inclusion of women included limited skills and employability due to gendered roles. It was important to view investment in gender equality as a means of developing employment opportunities.

12. **Ms. Cyrille** (Madagascar) said that her Government had implemented a number of legislative, judicial, regulatory and political mechanisms for the advancement and development of women's rights and gender equality in socioeconomic and other domains. The revised non-discriminatory Nationality Code adopted in 2016 allowed children with a Malagasy mother and foreign father to acquire Malagasy citizenship.

13. Madagascar had reinforced its institutional mechanisms for addressing the problems facing women and girls by creating counselling and legal advice centres with private sector participation. Malagasy men conscious of gender inequalities were a valuable resource for raising awareness of gender-related issues among opinion leaders, traditional leaders and young men. Gender considerations were incorporated into all Government development projects, and women's community councils ensured their reflection in community development.

14. To promote the advancement of women, Madagascar had introduced measures including educational grants and supplies for students, vocational centres for women and girls nationwide, and campaigns raising awareness of reproductive health, family planning and early marriage. Between 2015 and 2017, 2,668 women with obstetric fistulas had been treated and 43 surgeons trained in the treatment, while 144,000 birthing kits had been distributed. In 2017 alone, 2,837 Caesarean sections had been performed. To address violence against women, Madagascar had launched a national strategy based on its five-year action plan for 2017–2021, and was currently drafting a law to combat gender-based violence.

15. **Ms. Mehdiyeva** (Azerbaijan) said that the disproportionately low representation of women in public life and decision-making processes, gender stereotyping, vulnerability of women in conflict situations and other factors were barriers to gender equality. The Government had improved the situation of women in Azerbaijan through various policies. Women's representation in the National Assembly had increased from 11 per cent in 2005 to 17 per cent in 2015, women accounted for 35 per cent of elected candidates after the 2014 municipal elections compared with 4 per cent in 2004, and the number of women in key Government positions had also increased significantly.

16. Programmes and legislation addressed specific needs of women and girls as well as gender equality in opportunities, access to education and treatment in the workplace. A national strategy developed with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) introduced effective solutions to a number of reproductive health issues. Initiatives supporting small and medium-sized businesses were aimed at enhancing the economic empowerment and community-based decision-making role of women in rural areas.

17. Azerbaijan had enacted legislation to combat domestic violence, and called on Member States to fund measures countering gender-based violence. It was also creating a database of assaults and establishing monitoring groups to analyse causes and protect victims of abuse.

18. **Mr. Yao** Shaojun (China) said that despite encouraging progress in the advancement of women, regional conflicts, climate change, and the refugee and migrant crisis disproportionately affected women and required action by the international community.

19. Strategies for women's advancement needed to include the gender perspective and safeguard women's rights to ensure gender equality in social development, and Member States should implement all objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development consistently. Increased financial and technical assistance of developing countries was necessary to eliminate regional imbalances in the advancement of women. Vulnerable groups including women with disabilities, elderly women and female victims of human trafficking required greater protection.

20. China had formulated over one hundred laws, rules and regulations to safeguard women's rights and protect

them from discrimination and violence. The Programme for the Development of Chinese Women (2011–2020) had already achieved most of its indicators for monitoring advances in women's entrepreneurship, participation in decision-making, health and access to education. Women accounted for over 42 per cent of total employment and around half of enrolments in tertiary education, while the maternal mortality rate had fallen to approximately 20 deaths per 100,000.

21. **Mr. Skinner-Klée** (Guatemala) said that women accounted for 50 per cent of the economically active population in his country. The Government was committed to the empowerment of women and children in all sectors by monitoring compliance with and updating employment legislation, implementing a national minimum wage and providing women with training, education and technical assistance to raise productivity levels, providing social protection of working women and guaranteeing women and migrants access to information, training and advice in defending their labour rights.

22. The Government had focused on the empowerment of women and girls to achieve equality in employment, eliminate gender-based discrimination and violence, and end early and forced marriage. Laws had been enacted outlawing femicide on religious or cultural grounds as well as sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking regardless of consent. At the first meeting of the Women, Peace and Security National Focal Points Network in April 2017, Guatemala had exchanged best practices and discussed practical challenges of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and had produced a national action plan for its implementation, its greatest achievement in protecting the rights of women in conflict and post-conflict situations.

23. **Mr. Douti** (Togo), highlighting the important contribution of women to development, said that Togo was advancing the rights of women and girls through measures to attain gender equality in access to education and training that had achieved parity in preschool and primary attendance and raised the primary school completion rate of girls from 54 per cent in 2007 to 83 per cent in 2016. Increases in literacy rates among women had been supported by a Government subsidy funding classes for an additional 1,200 women in rural areas each year. The Government had established 7,500 literacy centres and 250 village libraries nationally.

24. The empowerment of women was a powerful driver of economic growth and job creation for sustainable improvements in living conditions. Several economic programmes had benefitted over 700,000 people, mostly women, by providing assistance such as financial services for the poorest members of society. The volunteer programme for young Togolese had provided work for thousands of young women. Institutional and programme reforms were designed to ensure the consideration of women's rights in all development processes.

25. The number of National Assembly seats held by women had risen from 11 per cent to 15 per cent since 2007 and included some key senior positions. Satisfactory reductions in infant and maternal mortality had been achieved in part through the provision of reproductive health advice, insecticide-treated mosquito nets and obstetric fistula care.

26. **Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that significant legal, institutional and societal progress had been made in the advancement of women, who had become key development actors as the country strived to become an emerging economy. Special funds had provided over 110,000 women with access to finance, markets, information and technology, facilitating their socioeconomic empowerment.

27. Significant reforms expanded free education, established compulsory schooling for children aged 6 to 16 years and required separate school bathrooms for boys and girls, while also founding boarding schools in regions with high rates of early marriage and pregnancy among schoolgirls and introducing grants to provide girls with technical and vocational training. The military and police academies began accepting female candidates in 2013 and 2015, respectively. Gender equality in employment was guaranteed by article 4 of the Constitution.

28. Women made up half of the Constitutional Council and one-third of the Economic, Social, Environmental and Cultural Council, a testament to the political will to eliminate gender discrimination and barriers to the advancement of women, improving their living conditions and elevating their decision-making power in Ivorian society. The Government also sought to promote women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment through training and finance initiatives. Gender-related issues must be addressed from the perspective of human rights to break down sociocultural stereotypes.

29. **Ms. Pongor** (Hungary) said that the Government supported international measures for gender equality and the empowerment of women, including the full implementation of Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, the prevention and elimination of all forms of gender-based violence, the participation of women in peace processes and the prevention of conflicts.

30. Committed to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, Hungary had allocated 9.6 million euros to extend victim services with psychological and legal support, protected victim accommodation and awareness-raising measures. The Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy encompassed child welfare, education, employment, training, healthcare and housing. A presidential commission on research careers for women established in 2017 and specialized national talent development programmes promoted gender parity in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and other fields.

31. Full and productive employment was a top priority, with a focus on women and disadvantaged groups. A programme to reduce the school dropout rate of Roma girls aged 10-18 had been launched in 2015. The Government sought to balance work and family commitments with stable, targeted and flexible social policies enabling women to decide how and when they returned to employment after childbirth. Maternity support and three years of paid childcare leave were universal. Women had the right to work part-time until their child reached the age of three, and companies employing women with young children were eligible for a subsidy.

32. **Mr. Joshi** (India) said that rapid urbanization and new, disruptive technologies presented both opportunities and challenges for women's empowerment. Gender equality had been enshrined in the Constitution of India almost seventy years ago, and the political, social and economic empowerment of women had been a major policy objective of his Government. Over 1.3 million elected women representatives were helping to formulate and implement gender-sensitive policies throughout India. Women had excelled in all domains and held several senior governmental positions. An all-female team of Indian naval officers was currently navigating the globe, serving as role models for millions of women and girls.

33. Programmes for poverty eradication and financial inclusion had a special focus on women's empowerment. Gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive budgeting had been institutionalized in public policy initiatives, and virtual gender parity had been achieved in education. Adequate sanitation infrastructure currently under construction would contribute to women's safety. Recently introduced measures to prevent gender-based violence included helplines, panic buttons on mobile phone handsets, crisis centres, adequate street lighting and closed-circuit surveillance systems. Indian states had been advised to implement a 33 per cent quota of women police officers, and some states had all-female police stations.

34. India had been a regular contributor to funding for UN-Women and had conducted regular training courses for women peacekeepers in collaboration with UN-Women. As part of South-South cooperation, India partnered with fellow developing countries in capacity-building programmes that included training semi-literate rural middle-aged women as engineers to achieve rural electrification using solar power.

35. **Mr. El Hacen** (Mauritania) said that gender equality was enshrined in his country's Constitution, which guaranteed women all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights pursuant to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. The Government had adopted all international instruments regarding the rights of women and girls and had criminalized all forms of gender-based violence.

36. Mauritania had adopted a qualitative approach to improving the situation of women in all national programmes and had implemented a strategy to empower women and remove socioeconomic obstacles to their development. Positive discrimination promoted the status of women, who played a key role in all areas of life including the executive, legislative and judicial branches. The retirement age for both women and men was sixty. Barriers to women's entry into domains such as the police and armed forces had been removed.

37. The Government had sought to facilitate women's access to the labour market with easy credit for small and medium-sized enterprises, benefitting rural women and women with disabilities in particular and giving rise to trade networks for and spearheaded by women. Mauritania prioritized the health of women and girls and was combating harmful practices.

38. **Ms. Halvorsen** (Denmark), speaking as a youth delegate, said that when discussing gender equality and the advancement of women, access to education for young women and the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including the right to legal and safe abortion, were key related issues that required comprehensive and progressive approaches from a human rights perspective. Women and girls had the right to freely choose their romantic and marital partners and decide on their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Denmark was a founding member of the She Decides movement for the protection and advancement of the rights of all women and girls.

39. The advancement of women and gender equality went hand in hand with the empowerment and inclusion of the young generation that represented the future. Gender equality was an issue for both young women and men, who should experience equal rights, opportunity

and respect regardless of their gender. The advancement of women was a universal concern to be addressed around the world so that every girl and woman could decide what she wanted to do with her body, her life and her future, with no gender-based limitations of opportunity.

40. **Mr. Ri** Song Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that women in his country participated actively in state and social activities and contributed significantly to social development. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea strove to promote and protect human rights, particularly women's rights. The Government had submitted the second to fourth combined report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to the treaty body in April 2016, would take part in the sixty-eighth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in November 2017, and would actively strive for the implementation of gender equality, advocacy of women's rights, the advancement and well-being of women, and strengthened international cooperation.

41. His delegation wished to highlight a heinous crime against women committed by Japan, which had forced more than 200,000 Korean women and girls into sexual slavery during the Second World War and had insulted the victims by referring to them as prostitutes. Despite requests from the international community, Japan had denied its crime to date and must admit its state and legal responsibility. The United Nations should insist that Japan made a sincere official apology and provide compensation.

42. His delegation noted that two years had passed since the Republic of Korea had abducted twelve women from his country, refusing to provide information on their fate or allow them to be repatriated. The Government and the victims' parents had repeatedly asked the Secretary-General, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council to place the crime on the agenda of the Organization and hold the criminals accountable in the international court but had yet to receive a positive response. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea had also proposed a visit to North and South Korea by the High Commissioner for Human Rights to resolve the abduction. South Korean authorities should apologize immediately and return the abducted women.

43. **Ms. Horbachova** (Ukraine) said that Ukraine had improved its national legislation and policies on gender equality by adopting national action plans to implement the human rights strategy up to 2020 and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. Recommendations from the consideration of the eighth periodic report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had been incorporated into a new state social programme for equal rights and opportunities for women and men up to 2021.

44. The Government of Ukraine was promoting gender equality in all of its policies and activities. In 2017, the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, was assigned responsibility for the gender equality policy to advance and prioritize gender equality and women's rights. At the first official visit to Ukraine in June 2017, the Executive Director of UN-Women had launched two gender-related initiatives.

45. Ukraine reiterated its commitment to ensuring integration of the provisions of the women, peace and security agenda into its domestic policies and laws. The Equal Opportunities Inter-Factional Union (Caucus) was actively developing legislative initiatives to defend gender equality in parliament. Ukrainian women were becoming critical agents of change in the face of Russian aggression, as demonstrated by the mediation efforts of the First Deputy Chair of the Ukrainian Parliament.

46. **Ms. Nguele Makouelet** (Congo) said that her Government was focused on achieving the empowerment of women and girls, the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence and the advancement of gender equality.

47. Progress required the full equal participation of women at all decision-making levels, and significant advances had been made in women's participation in public life. Following the 2016 electoral law stipulating a 30 per cent minimum quota for female candidates and strict rotation of top-level positions in the municipalities, the number of women elected to the senate, the national assembly and county councils had risen, with gender parity achieved in some counties.

48. Government efforts to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination were detailed in its seventh report, which was pending review by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Government ministries, specialized associations and legal clinics organized annual awareness-raising campaigns on the rights of women, drafted in local languages to reach all levels of the community. Young women continued to study for legal careers at the National School of Administration and Magistracy, and certain university courses promoted gender equality.

49. **Ms. Sandoval** (Nicaragua) said that women had a central role in Nicaragua as a result of significant

changes in society, participating in decision-making at all levels and benefiting increasingly from laws and public policy that gave them more rights. Some 32 per cent of judges were female, including 65 per cent of local and district court judges, and the number of appeals court judges had risen by 47 per cent. Women held 52 per cent of administrative posts, many at the management level.

50. The "faith, family and community" model had been raising the living standards of women and their families, with improved health care reducing maternal mortality among women in rural areas. Launched in April 2017, the Productive Food Programme aimed to empower 90 per cent of women with control over their own development and wellbeing. The political progress of Nicaraguan women was demonstrated in the Women in Politics Map published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN-Women in March 2017, which provided a world ranking of women's participation in governments and parliaments.

51. **Mr. Al-Abdali** (Oman) said that women and men had equal rights in his country and the freedom to choose where to live and work. Oman played a leadership role in the advancement of women, who constituted the majority in education programmes and labour markets. Oman celebrated a national day of women on 7 October every year to highlight their role in society.

52. Women had positions in public administration, including ministerial, ambassadorial and senatorial posts, as well as in the judiciary and security forces. They also had the right to vote and hold elected office, and benefited equally from housing assistance. The Government had passed laws protecting women from all forms of discrimination and granting paid maternity leave of fifty days per year. Oman would spare no effort in integrating the advancement of women into all programmes and projects in the hope that society would benefit.

53. **Mr. Diarra** (Mali) said that his Government had adopted various measures to improve the legal, economic and social status of women. The National Gender Policy granted women access to all levels of public administration, including the security forces, for increased participation in decision-making processes. As a result of a law passed in December 2015 establishing minimum 30 per cent quotas for appointed and elective posts to be held by women, over 30 per cent of municipal councillors were female following local elections in November 2016.

54. In addition to continued efforts to eradicate discriminatory sociocultural practices, Mali had established a fund for the empowerment of women and had introduced a business development programme to raise the incomes of women working in the shea butter sector. A flagship programme launched in March 2017 aimed to increase women's visibility, participation and leadership in business management.

55. A significant increase in the participation of girls in schooling at all levels since 2000 and an ongoing informal literacy and education strategy were essential to the economic empowerment of women. The Government had also instituted mandatory health insurance and medical assistance schemes to give women more control over their health care, and planned to introduce universal health care by 2018 to eliminate health service inequalities for women in rural areas and in the informal employment sector.

56. **Ms. Fofana** (Burkina Faso) said that the advancement of women, who constituted more than half the population of many countries, was essential to ensure harmonious and inclusive development. Burkina Faso had made excellent progress on women's empowerment with initiatives including a programme to combat gender-based violence, a 30 per cent quota for female candidates in legislative and municipal elections, a law facilitating women's ownership of rural property, and national strategies to eliminate gender disparity in education and support women's entrepreneurship.

57. It was nevertheless important to focus on the many remaining obstacles to the empowerment of women if sustainable development was to be achieved. The Government had centred its new national development framework on gender, including a plan to increase the proportion of women in appointed and elected posts, the operationalization of treatment for victims of gender-based violence and the reinforcement of socio-educational services to reduce school dropout rates and facilitate the reintegration of girls with incomplete or no schooling. A strategy for the advancement and protection of young girls had been adopted, and the State had prioritized women for the allocation of newly developed land with a view to increasing the rate of female ownership to 30 per cent by 2019.

58. **Ms. Mukhtar** (Sudan) said that the Sudan had developed strategies to promote the role of women in society, and part of the 2012 national development plan focused specifically on women. In 2007, it had established a national policy for the advancement of women, addressing crucial areas such as health, environment, education, economic development, participation in decision-making processes, conflict resolution, peacebuilding and the protection of rights. A

national strategy to combat discrimination against women had been developed in 2008. The Government had spearheaded a project to promote the role of women, focusing on rural women and Darfur, and had introduced training programmes for rural women. It had also launched campaigns to raise awareness of health and food issues pertaining to women.

59. The Constitution guaranteed gender equality in public life, and women enjoyed equal pay for equal work as well as all due economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. The Sudan had established a strategy to eradicate gender-based violence in 2005, and had subsequently created a unit to combat violence against women and girls and a police unit for the protection of families and children. In 2014, a law was adopted to combat the trafficking of women and children. The Government had also created a unit within the North Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission to support women specifically. An independent human rights commission was chaired by a woman.

60. Climate change, migration, financial crises and poverty, conflicts and certain aspects of tradition had a negative impact on the advancement of women. The Sudan called upon the international community to address those issues comprehensively by cancelling the debt of developing countries so that they could benefit from subsidies and initiatives for least developed countries with technical and material improvements that would ultimately benefit women. Her delegation hailed the decision taken earlier that day to lift economic sanctions on the Sudan.

61. **Ms. Sorto** (El Salvador) said that her country had made significant advances in protecting the rights of women with the enactment of laws in 2011 and 2012 on the promotion of gender equality, the elimination of gender-based discrimination and violence, and the protection of women's rights. There had been a 22 per cent rise in the number of gender policies, as well as double-digit increases in the numbers of institutions with gender units, equality plans and specific equality budgets. Many institutions had also implemented staff training and campaigns addressing gender rights, equality, discrimination and violence against women. The Government had also raised awareness of women's rights and gender-based violence among the population.

62. In July 2017, El Salvador had launched a national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and was coordinator of the CELAC working group on the advancement of women through equality and empowerment. The Government was committed to addressing the needs of specific groups such as elderly, indigenous or migrant women and women with disabilities. It had also developed strategies supporting the right of adolescent girls to comprehensive, appropriate and quality health care with an emphasis on sexual and reproductive health. Greater coordination on gender-based discrimination was needed at the national, regional and international levels.

63. **Mr. Gebru** (Ethiopia) said that his Government had been working diligently to improve the lives of women by combating harmful traditional practices and improving their economic empowerment and political participation. Ethiopia's commitments to women's rights were guided by its Constitution together with national and international laws, policies and instruments. Gender issues had been mainstreamed in primary governmental activities.

64. Traditional practices harmful to women had been reduced through criminalization and awareness-raising measures. A comprehensive strategy was in place to prevent violence against women and girls while bringing perpetrators to justice. Women's representation had increased in judicial, federal, regional and local bodies, and their economic empowerment was supported through microfinance schemes, equal landholding rights, affirmative action policies resulting in 50 per cent female ownership of urban condominiums and reserving half of the job opportunities arising from urban development for women.

65. An ongoing health extension programme had succeeded in deploying over 41,000 health extension workers, almost all female, and initiatives promoting the right of women to reproductive health, family planning services, increased pre- and post-natal health care, and expanded delivery by experts had helped decrease maternal and child mortality.

66. **Mr. Kafle** (Nepal) said that Nepal was committed to eliminating gender-based discrimination and violence using a rights-based approach to the social, economic and political empowerment of women and girls, particularly those living in rural areas, and ensuring their rights to health, education, employment, property and participation in public life.

67. Recent local elections had filled almost half of all posts with female representatives, and the Constitution reserved 33 per cent of seats in federal and provincial parliaments for women while also stipulating that holders of the positions of President and Vice-President must be of different genders or from different communities, and that either the Speaker or Deputy Speaker of the lower house and Chair or Vice-Chair of the upper house must be female.

68. Nepal had been submitting periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, had recently extended an invitation to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, and was the first country in its region to develop a national action plan on Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008). Progress on literacy, maternal health, and women's political participation and working conditions advanced gender equality and empowerment and raised hope of achieving the goal of the Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality campaign by 2030.

69. **Mr. Panayotov** (Bulgaria) said that as President of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Bulgaria strongly advocated the full realization of the human rights of women and girls with disabilities and their active participation in society on an equal basis with others. The Government had made substantial progress on women's empowerment and participation in decision-making at all levels. Gender equality and non-discrimination were basic principles enshrined in the Constitution and had been successfully mainstreamed in national legislation, policies and programmes.

70. Bulgaria had adopted a new law on equality between women and men in 2016, having previously signed the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in 2015. His country had already observed positive results for the economy from the increased participation of women in the labour market resulting from legislative and policy measures that ensured equality of treatment, economic independence and pay, and helped to overcome gender-based stereotypes. Civil society in Bulgaria also played a crucial role in promoting gender equality by actively participating in the elaboration of suitable legislation and policies.

71. **Mr. Dzonzi** (Malawi) said that in addition to acceding to various regional and international instruments, Malawi had adopted legislative, policy, judicial and institutional measures aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of women. Women's rights initiatives helped to increase gender equality, access to wealth creation, overall quality of life for women, and representation in governance and public service. In 2017, the Government had disseminated gender-related laws to traditional authorities for harmonization with their respective by-laws, rolled out a gender-based violence module for the Integrated Information Management System, implemented a nationwide strategy to strengthen men's engagement and initiatives in gender equality and women's empowerment, and trained 389 groups of women in various business skills.

72. **Ms. Alfuhaid** (Kuwait) said that her Government firmly believed that successful achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals required the promotion of gender equality and the skills of women. Kuwait encouraged women to participate in all sectors of society, with women participating in decision-making, holding key Government positions and accounting for 79 per cent of administrative staff. Over 65,000 employees at the Ministry of Education were women compared to 11,000 men.

73. Her country would continue to promote the further empowerment of women and ensure their active participation in society. It had also sought to revitalize the role of women in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme by implementing several projects promoting the empowerment of women. The Government had reviewed all legislation to eliminate gender discrimination, and was working to enhance the technical skills and independence of women through training initiatives to strengthen women's participation in public life, provide services for working women and support their role in small and medium-sized businesses.

74. **Mr. Hendricks** (South Africa) said that women in his country were disproportionately affected by poverty; policies aimed at their economic empowerment were thus essential, as were measures addressing norms and stereotypes that hindered gender equality. Laws based on the principle of equal pay for equal work were critical for eliminating the gender pay gap. Priority should be given to women in rural areas facing multiple forms of discrimination.

75. Poverty, unemployment and lack of income had made some women dependent on male abusers. South Africa had compiled a range of legislative measures to address all forms of violence against women including domestic violence, contact crimes, sexual offences, economic and sexual exploitation, and trafficking. By providing sexual and reproductive health care such as anti-retroviral medication for sex workers and victims of sexual violence and rape, the Government sought to restore the dignity of marginalized women.

76. **Mr. Grigoryan** (Armenia) said that the international community must accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a prerequisite to achieving gender equality. In recent years, Armenia had initiated a number of legislative reforms and elaborated national action plans for the advancement of women. Amendments to the electoral code promoted the participation of women

in decision-making processes, while laws assisting victims of human trafficking and exploitation and establishing equal rights and opportunities were important instruments for promoting gender equality and human rights.

77. A draft law on the prevention of domestic violence and protection of victims had been submitted to the President for consideration in August 2017. Armenia had always advocated for the protection of the rights of women living in conflict zones, to which international human rights instruments, including special United Nations procedures and agencies, should have unimpeded access. Armenia believed that the involvement of women in peace processes might become an efficient confidence-building measure and an important reinforcement for reconciliation efforts. Women peace activists should be viewed and promoted as agents of peaceful change and peacebuilding in their societies.

78. **Mr. da Costa e Silva** (Timor-Leste) said that Timor-Leste had made good progress on the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality. Since the restoration of its independence 15 years ago, the country had incorporated the protection of women's rights into its policies and laws, and gender equality was enshrined in the Constitution. The Government had also adopted a gender mainstreaming policy and gender budgeting under the oversight of the Secretary of State for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion. Timor-Leste had also adopted laws to promote women's involvement in politics, with a 33 per cent quota for women in political party lists and reserved numbers of seats for women at local government level. As a result, 38 per cent of seats in the national parliament were held by women, the highest level in the Asia-Pacific region, and women had been elected to traditionally male positions such as village chief. Women were also well represented in the executive and judicial branches and in the diplomatic corps.

79. Timor-Leste had enacted a law codifying domestic violence as a public crime, and its penal code contained provisions on sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment, violence against women, human trafficking and the organization and procurement of prostitution services. The 2017–2021 National Action Plan against Gender-Based Violence had been launched in 2017 with objectives including the reduction of cases of violence and the provision of victim support. The Government had taken steps to promote women's economic development with measures supporting female entrepreneurship, access to credit, training, and capacity development to help women move from the informal to the formal sector.

80. **Ms. Alamin** (Libya) said that despite the current transitional circumstances facing Libya, the Government was committed to combating gender discrimination and defending the rights of women to enjoy education, health care, social welfare and pension rights, and to engage in economic activities. Her country was also committed to implementing all international instruments and commitments strengthening the rights of women and protecting women from all forms of discrimination.

81. Libya condemned all forms of violence against women including sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, physical abuse, domestic violence and violence in the workplace, which affected women of all social classes and in all societies. Her delegation also condemned human trafficking, especially of migrant women and women in conflict zones, which was a crime against humanity. Libyan women had gained visibility in prominent decision-making positions in parliament or as ministers in the Government of National Accord. They wanted the new constitution to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination between men and women, ensuring their right to full participation on an equal basis. The Government of National Accord should issue decree 210 of 2016 on the establishment of a women's promotion and protection unit to implement the 2015 Political Agreement.

82. The training and education of women was critical to ensuring women's full rights and facilitating their contribution to national development. Rural women played a critical role in the economic development of local communities, especially in developing countries whose economies depended on agriculture. Rural women were also responsible for raising the standard of living of their families, but continued to suffer from marginalization and discrimination.

83. **Mr. Aliu** (Ghana) said that violence against women and girls, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, the continued exclusion of women from economic opportunities, legal impediments to land ownership and access to inheritance, and poor maternal health services endangered the gains made in the empowerment of women in Ghana.

84. The Government had implemented measures for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls, including the National Gender Policy to mainstream gender concerns in all governmental planning processes, the Domestic Violence Act criminalizing harmful cultural practices, the National Child and Family

Welfare Policy and the National Social Protection Policy.

85. Ghana had introduced microcredit for small and medium-sized enterprises to ensure that women, particularly in rural communities, could obtain loans to boost their economic activity, and had intensified efforts to provide training, start-up equipment and financial support for unemployed young women. The Government was working with other stakeholders to end child marriage and other harmful cultural practices to break the cycle of poverty and deprivation, and was continuing the obstetric fistula repair programme, helping women treated for fistula to start their own businesses after surgery.

86. The Free Senior High School Education Policy launched in September 2017 would give thousands of young people access free secondary school education. Between 1998 and 2014, access to skilled ante-natal care rose from 82 per cent to 97 per cent and deliveries in health facilities from 42 per cent to 73 per cent, while 81 per cent of mothers received a post-natal check-up within the first two days after delivery, helping reduce maternal mortality from 467 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 319 in 2015.

87. **Ms. Haidour** (Morocco) said that women still faced obstacles to their advancement, such as inequalities in rates of school enrolment, literacy and scientific knowledge acquisition, and rising maternal and infant mortality. Their physical and psychological wellbeing was deteriorating as a result of gender-based violence, and diseases including HIV-AIDS orphaned more and more children, with negative consequences for societies. Moroccan women had seen significant progress and reached senior Government positions throughout the country including ambassador, prefect and director.

88. King Mohammed VI had created a foundation that addressed the needs of the poor and people with disabilities and focused on improving the situation of women and girls of school age, particularly in rural areas. Following the reform of the Moroccan family code in February 2004, measures had been introduced to promote women's access to top administrative and public posts and women had been appointed to the council of religious leaders. Adopted in 2011, the Constitution established the principle of gender equality in the civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental arenas.

89. The Government had adopted a law to combat all forms of discrimination and approved an equality plan, and was currently debating a law on violence against women. Multipurpose women's centres were being updated and standardized around the country. Morocco had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1993, acceded to its optional protocol in 2008 and lifted all reservations in 2011. The country applied a zero-tolerance policy to violence against women.

90. **Ms. Christensen** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that greater action was needed to live up to joint commitments and reach all women and girls, especially the most vulnerable. Sixty per cent of the world's unimmunized children were living in fragile settings where more than half of all maternal, newborn and child deaths occurred, and women and girls with disabilities faced additional risks and barriers to assistance. Access to quality health services and other basic needs was essential. The solution would require significant investment in the institutional capacity of local actors, empowerment of health workers and first responders with access to necessary support, and gender and diversity training to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence.

91. Women and girls made up half of refugees worldwide and faced specific risks during migration. In Greece, the IFRC had set up a cash transfer programme that encompassed gender-related needs and had demonstrated how cash could reduce the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence. A programme in Niger offered economic opportunities to women who migrated for economic reasons but often fell prey to sexual exploitation and abuse. Targeting vulnerable heads of household who might leave for lack of economic alternatives, the project helped extremely vulnerable women and children.

92. **Mr. Cassidy** (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that inequality between women and men persisted in global labour markets, in respect of opportunity, treatment and outcomes. Advancements in women's educational achievements had not translated into comparable improvement in their employment prospects. In many parts of the world, women had fewer job opportunities and were more likely to remain unemployed or accept lower quality jobs. Progress on those obstacles had been slow and limited to a few regions. The unequal distribution of unpaid care and housework between genders and between families and society was an important determinant of gender inequalities at work.

93. As part of its upcoming centenary, ILO had launched the Women at Work Initiative to document the status and conditions of working women, identifying innovative sources of impetus for its work and

collaboration with key stakeholders to promote full gender equality and non-discrimination. In June 2017, the organization published a major report showing that women had more limited access to the labour market and quality employment opportunities. Closing those gaps would yield significant economic benefits and improve individual welfare.

94. ILO had also teamed up with Gallup World Poll to undertake pioneering surveys in 140 countries identifying global perceptions and realities of both genders regarding women and work. The results revealed that most women and men preferred women to have paid jobs and indicated the need for family-supportive policies enabling women to remain and progress in paid employment and encouraging men to assume their share of the care workload.

95. **Ms. Elliott** (World Food Programme (WFP)), speaking also on behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), said that women in rural areas performed multiple roles, including domestic and agricultural chores and care of the young, sick and elderly, and were often invisible and undervalued. Their health, wellbeing and economic situation were also impaired by discrimination regarding property ownership and inheritance, training and education, and financial services and decision-making.

96. Environmental degradation and climate change often affected poor rural women disproportionately. Women with limited resources and income were more at risk of hunger, malnutrition and negative coping strategies. Where their access to productive resources, markets, climate information services, technology and training was enhanced, women's lives transformed and household food consumption tended to increase. The empowerment of rural women also led to greater influence in both household and community decision-making.

97. Support for women farmers in reducing post-harvest losses through food handling training and access to storage and transport technologies was designed to reduce the enormous levels of food waste. Innovative gender-responsive and climate-smart agricultural practices helped to build the climate resilience of women in rural areas and manage the risks associated with weather-related disasters.

Statements in exercise of the right of reply

98. **Mr. Saito** (Japan), responding to the statement made by Democratic People's Republic of Korea, said that the allegations and figures cited were based on factual error and totally groundless.

99. **Mr. Kang** Sangwook (Republic of Korea), responding to the statement made by Democratic People's Republic of Korea, said that over 30,000 North Korean workers had defected to the Republic of Korea of their own free will and had been admitted by the Government on humanitarian grounds. His delegation urged the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to improve the human rights situation of its people instead of pursuing nuclear development.

100. **Mr. Ri** Song Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that it was universally accepted that Japan had forced thousands of women to be sex slaves during the Second World War, which was an unpardonable crime against humanity. Japan should unconditionally and immediately admit its heinous crime. It was ridiculous to hear the South Korean delegation talk nonsense about the human rights situation in his country. The administration of the Republic of Korea had ordered the abduction of twelve women from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and had refused to provide information on the status of the victims. The group abduction was a grave violation of the human rights and dignity of the women, and another North Korean citizen had also been detained involuntarily in South Korea since 2011. The United Nations human rights mechanisms should hold the South Korean authorities accountable for their crimes.

101. **Mr. Saito** (Japan) said that the position of Japan on the issue was as previously stated, and he refrained from another detailed rebuttal. Since the end of the Second World War, Japan had become a democratic and peace-loving nation committed to the rule of law and the peace and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and the world.

102. **Mr. Kang** Sangwook (Republic of Korea) said that his delegation would not reiterate its previous response to the preposterous arguments. He urged North Korea to change its policies and improve the dire human rights circumstances of its people by cooperating with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and implementing relevant United Nations resolutions.

103. **Mr. Ri** Song Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that Japan was using its description of contributions to women, peace and security to cover up its brutal sex slavery crimes. If the Japanese administration did not apologize sincerely and give assurances never to commit such heinous crimes against women and humanity again, it would not be accepted as a peace-loving country by the international community.

Turning to the Republic of Korea, he said that the South Korean authorities had committed numerous human rights violations regularized those violations with fascist evil law, and conducted illegal inspections of civilians. Sexual assault, rape and murder by United States troops stationed in South Korea had also taken place. The Republic of Korea should immediately end its human rights campaign against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, focus on its own human rights situation and return the abducted North Korean citizens.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.